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USAID FOR ANE/EAA

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SUMATRA EARTHQUAKE VICTIMS CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING DAY

1. (U) SUMMARY. U.S. Consulate Medan hosted Thanksgiving Day dinner in Padang, West Sumatra, the province struck by a catastrophic earthquake on September 30. ConGen Medan hosted 85 guests including senior government officials, U.S. alumni, high school students, Americans and ordinary citizens who acted heroically. ConGen began the event by reading President Obama's Thanksgiving Day Proclamation and asking everyone to pray for the victims of the earthquake. The Vice Governor thanked the U.S. for its care and support. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) ConGen Medan served up three boiled turkeys (no ovens were available) with all the trimmings to a group of 85 guests in Padang to celebrate Thanksgiving Day. Padang was chosen for this year's commemoration in light of the September 30 earthquake which killed over 1,100 persons and left much of the province in shambles. Guests included senior civilian, police and military officials, university rectors, dozens of U.S. alumni, principals and students from two model public schools which were destroyed and the half dozen Americans living in Padang. Several citizens who suffered great losses or performed heroic acts during the earthquake also attended.

3. (U) In his remarks, ConGen noted that the resilient spirit of the West Sumatran people in coming together in the face of adversity through their faith exemplified the spirit of Thanksgiving, as did the response by the U.S. and the international community in helping West Sumatra in its time of need. Vice Governor Marlis Rahman said he was moved by the U.S. concern and support. He noted that Thanksgiving is similar to the Muslim holy day of Halal Bi Halal.

4. (U) ConGen also recognized five persons at the dinner who faced great hardship or saved lives:
-- The parents of Lani, a 12-year-old girl who lost both legs when a building fell on her and is recuperating at the wrecked hospital where the U.S. Navy set up its field hospital. ConGen also visited Lani, giving her a Panda Bear.
-- Zahra, a small girl trapped up to her neck in a landslide. Her father responded to her calls, jumped in and pulled her out before the mud could bury her.
-- Zulkifli, who ran into his home to rescue his young daughter, suffering head injuries.
-- Junaedi, a fireman who rushed into a collapsed building saving many lives.
-- Richard, a Padang city official who lost his daughter in the rubble.

5. (U) The more than USD12 million the USG provided in emergency assistance to West Sumatra is widely appreciated, many seeing the U.S. as leading the world in helping West Sumatra. The economy is beginning to recover with local markets bustling and farmers returning to the fields.

6. Nevertheless, West Sumatra faces a daunting challenge to rebuild tens of thousands of damaged homes and buildings, irrigation systems, and other infrastructure. Padang and parts of the rest of the province remain in shambles. The GOI is expected to announce a

rehabilitation and reconstruction action plan costing an estimated USD700 million, with GOI funds not anticipated until March 2010.

17. The Padang Thanksgiving Day event received extensive local and national press coverage and was commented on in several blogs. The U.S. Consulate Medan Facebook page's pictures of the event received numerous comments as well.

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